

November 15, 2020 Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year A)
Answer Hazy, Try Again Later.

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

¹Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. ²For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. ³When they say, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape! ⁴But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; ⁵for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. ⁶So then let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober; ⁷for those who sleep sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night. ⁸But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. ⁹For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. ¹¹Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

A lawyer's son explained to me that clergy never get picked for juries because being persons of authority they might unduly influence the other jurors. It was a novel idea thinking clergy were still persons of authority, but though I went never was I selected to serve. One thing I noticed sat on a dusty windowsill in the courthouse. It was a black plastic globe with the number eight painted on it. My sister had one to help her and her giddy friends predict which of their many beaux they would eventually marry and be happy every after. If you pick up the globe, ask it a question, shake it then turn it over a magic answer would rise from the murky liquid in the interior and tell you, "as I see it, yes," or "better not tell you now," or my favorite, "reply hazy, try again later." So this object in the courthouse window; was it left by some judge who had trouble deciding cases? Was it an extension of blind justice to seek an unbiased opinion on a case? Or, did a bored teenager leave it because they didn't like the person they were predicted to marry?

There is a way of using the Bible that is tantamount to shaking up the eight ball and ferreting out an answer. In the two thousand years since Christ walked among us

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many have pointed to the Bible to say the day of the Lord is upon us because it says right here that Og, Gog, and Maygog are lined up to do battle in the middle east. You can easily fill in who those characters might be and every era has produced candidates and conflicts and with a little editorial license the end is near. All of that ignores the clearly statement, "No one knows the day or time."

I offer you two ways to go with this problem. Either accept that the world keeps ending and no one noticed or these predictions are prophecy not fortune telling. At the mega level the world has been skating on the edge of Armageddon for quite some time. It could be that humans aren't actually equipped to handle the complex technologies and society we have created. It is wise to consider being careful with the base emotions that can drive us to destroy others because they share those emotions. You might keep in mind that if the world ended tomorrow how would you live your life until then?

Discovering that prophecy is not fortune telling may help put these Biblical predictions in their place. Prophecy gives you an option to change your behavior and avert bad outcomes. It can also motivate good behavior toward better outcomes. If some magical mystical battle on the planes of Israel is in the cards then there's not much you and I can do about it. When prophecy becomes inevitable it's because the situation has been pushed by us beyond the limit and then it can only speak of saving a remnant from the crash. We could try not to go over that cliff by heeding the warnings before the ground has fallen out from beneath us.

One misuse of Biblical prophecy has consequences for all of us. The end of the world is an event in the future, obviously. We cannot know when the world will end but we cannot lose sight of the fact that our participation in this world will end. When we see

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that the world will likely go on without us as it went on until we got here perhaps this time takes on the value suitable to the moment. Like the tree you plant never expecting to enjoy its shade you can anticipate those you will never know by making the world a welcoming place. So much of what we all do from day to day will fade as we fade, but how we treat our children, our neighbors; our relationships echo across generations.

The kindness of a long forgotten ancestor is visited to us through our parents and their parents, and we are motivated by such acts to treat the next generation a little better.

We may not be remember for the good we do but the good we do will be remembered.

Prayer: Ever-living God, before the earth was formed and even after it shall cease to be, you are God. Break into our short span of life and show us those things that are eternal, that we may serve your purpose in all we do; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you in unity with the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.